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STATE FOR EUR/CARC AND NEA/I

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SUBJECT: KOCHARIAN GIVES GREEN LIGHT TO ARMENIAN TROOP
ENHANCEMENT AFTER FEBRUARY ELECTION

REF: YEREVAN 1251

Classified By: CDA JOSEPH PENNINGTON FOR REASONS 1.4(B,D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Armen Gevorkian, Chief of Staff to President Kocharian, informed CDA on November 16 that Kocharian has agreed to authorize an Armenian troop enhancement in Iraq. The additional troops, however, will not be deployed before Armenia's February 19 presidential election. Gevorkian added that training and other preparation for the enhancement can begin immediately, so that additional troops can be on the ground in Iraq as soon as possible after the election. He noted that Armenia's plans to enhance its commitment in Iraq must not/not be made public, so as not to complicate the annual process of securing parliamentary reauthorization for Armenian participation in Iraq. CDA gave assurances that the USG would abide by this understanding, and pledged to look into the possible timing of US training for the additional troops. END SUMMARY

12. (C) KOCHARIAN APPROVES MORE TROOPS: In late October, President Kocharian told former Charge Perina that he needed some time to consider the US request for Armenia to enhance its troop presence in Iraq. In a November 17 meeting on another subject with presidential adviser Gevorkian, CDA raised the issue again and asked whether the President had reached a decision. The answer came two days later, when Gevorkian called in CDA to inform him that Kocharian had approved sending additional troops to Iraq, provided that they were not deployed in advance of Armenia's February 19 presidential election.

13. (C) PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORIZATION: Gevorkian explained that the mandate for the Armenian troop presence in Iraq must be reauthorized annually, with the next review due in December 12007. The Armenian MOD and MFA have prepared the necessary papers for the reauthorization, he said, and the GOAM would present the reauthorization bill to parliament in coming weeks. Gevorkian stressed, however, that the parliamentary reauthorization process does not limit the GOAM to a specific number of troops for Iraq. Once the mandate is renewed (a relatively routine matter), the Government can implement a decision to increase the number of Armenian troops participating in the mission.

14. (C) NO ENHANCEMENT BEFORE ELECTION: Gevorkian was clear, however, that Armenia would not deploy additional troops in Iraq until after the country's presidential election, now set for February 19. (COMMENT: Kocharian is constitutionally ineligible to seek another term as president. However, a new president will not be inaugurated until early April. Thus Kocharian will be in a position to make good on his commitment. Moreover, the odds-on favorite to succeed

Kocharian, current PM Serzh Sargsian, has indicated his likely support for a troop enhancement. END COMMENT).
Gevorkian also reiterated Kocharian's concern that the Armenian decision to enhance its presence in Iraq not/not be made public until the election is over. CDA assured him that the USG would abide by this understanding.

15. (C) TRAINING CAN MOVE FORWARD: Gevorkian said that President Kocharian believes training of the additional Armenian troops to be deployed in Iraq can and should begin now, so that the enhancement can take place very soon after the election. CDA recalled that DASD Cagan had pledged US help in training additional Armenian forces for Iraq, and promised to look into the possible timing for such training.

16. (C) COMMENT: Kocharian was decidedly unenthusiastic when we presented him with this idea back in October. He deserves credit for reconsidering his initial skepticism and recognizing the importance of this step for Armenia's relationship with the United States. With both Kocharian and Sargsian seemingly on board, the challenge now is to address the training and logistical issues that would enable the additional Armenian forces to hit the ground in Iraq soon after the election here. One possible hitch in implementing the enhancement would be an upset win by one of the PM's challengers for the presidency in February. We consider this unlikely, but not entirely outside the realm of possibility. How a different president -- Levon Ter-Petrossian, for example -- would view our request remains an open question.
PENNINGTON